

[D. Covin]

Beliefs & Customs - Folk Stuff

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK 8 Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER EMANUEL VERSCHLEISER

ADDRESS 1419 Jesup Ave. Bronx.

DATE Nov. 23, 1938

SUBJECT YIDDISH FOLKLORE - D COVIN

1. Date and time of interview Nov. 20, 1938
2. Place of interview "Crusader" Cafeteria on 14 St. N. Y. C.
3. Name and address of informant D. Covin, 220 E. 16th St. N. Y. C.
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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Playing checkers is one of his occupations. Writes a little which he tries to sell to Yiddish papers.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Emanuel Verschleiser

ADDRESS 1419 Jesup Ave. Bronx

DATE Nov. 23, 1938

SUBJECT YIDDISH FOLKLORE - D. COVIN A CHECKERS PLAYERS DISCUSSES THE GAME

Everybody thinks he knows how to play checkers. . . It looks an easy game. That's why so many people play it. . . It seems nothing to it. . . Bit But it takes genius, a real genius to play a real good game. It takes years and years to learn it . . . I and a friend of mine, we are both from New Haven, Conn, we used to come to the Labor Lyceum there and play. We have been playing it for years and we thought ourselves good at it. . . Then came a young kid and he played us a few game games and we knew that [we?] knew nothing about checkers. . . . I can win from almost anybody unless he is a professional. . . There are many places, in Coney Island and amusement parks where they play chess and checkers. There are a few long tables, some for chess and some for checkers. The rules of the game are that a man sits down and plays a game. If he loses he pays ten cents, if he wins, he pays nothing. I can play with as many people as you want at the same time. . I just have to have one look at the board while the other one sits and thinks. From the

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ten cents, I get five cents and the concessionaire gets five cents. A good day, I make ten dollars, I make five dollars and he makes five dollars. In the good years before the crisis, during the summers I used to make fifteen, twenty dollars a week. Of course now, the people are poor, it is hard to make something. . ?/

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A guy loses a couple of nickels, he starts to get nervous and counts his change. . Last year I played. During the summer I hardly made five dollars a week. The wives stand around and they keep nagging their husbands. . . Naturally they'd rather go to a movie. . . Once a woman came after her man in such a rage that she overturn all our tables. She made a scandal and said sh'd she'd call the police on us. Many comic things happened but who remembers them now. . . It's a scientific game. There are many books about it. There are some professionals who make a living at, giving exhibitions, teaching it, playing tournaments. There is Newhall Banks, was champion of America not so long ago. There's William Ryan, champion of New York State. There's another good player: Azer Lang. Another good player, Ginsburg of Brooklyn. In Coney Island, among the professionals, Ferguson would be a good player if he wouldn't be a drunk. There's Carl, "the bum". . . Everybody calls him "the bum". There are many places in New York, where they play all kinds of penny games and show all kinds of breaks, and they play checkers there too. There is a place on Broadway and 53rd St., there is a place on 42nd St. and Times Square. I used to come and play in the 53rd St. Place. There an interesting story happened to me. I even wrote it down. I played with a man. He looked like a tramp. You know, a hard old derby and shabby, old clothes. He lost five games one after another. He gave me five dimes. Then I wanted to give him a dime back. In the last game I took one move back and that should not be done. But he refused. We went out together. He bought me a fifty cent cigar and invited me to call at his house and play whenever I have time. He gave me five telephone numbers where to reach him. . . That was the famous millionaire, L. Segal, the owner of the Segal Lock Co. I played with him many times. I asked him why he came to play in such places and why he dressed up so. So he said he did it to learn the

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game. I asked him for a job. So he gave me to sell a little machine for sharpening razors which he invented. I sold a little. I come now to some barber place where they play the game. But there is nothing in it now.